

C-2 + CRM = BOQR03N



Photo by Matthew Thomas
Photo-composite by Allan Amen

By LCdr. Doug Crawford and LCdr. Scott McQuillen

Although this article is co-written by LCdrs. Crawford and McQuillen, it is written from the viewpoint of the pilot flying, LCdr. McQuillen.—Ed.

We were halfway through our WestPac cruise aboard USS *Kitty Hawk*. Well, we hadn't actually been aboard for the whole time. We COD guys prefer the comforts of the Atsugi BOQ. Doug and I were paired to fly to Atsugi with mail, cargo, and maintainers to do scheduled maintenance on the beach. We had gone through AOCS, flight school, the RAG, and now were on cruise together. We had confidence in each other's abilities as pilots. The weather brief showed only a few isolated thunderstorms

near Atsugi. After a good cat shot into a pink sky, we headed north and checked in with Yokota Approach after getting ATIS. The weather was 2,000 OVC, five miles visibility. Several thunderstorms were around the field; they had popped up just minutes earlier. We turned on the WX radar and painted the cells. A little red, some yellow, and a lot of green. Yokota told us to expect the ILS to runway 01. Our weather radar indicated one of the cells, small but red, was right in the middle of our final approach course. We declined

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the ILS, and Yokota offered us the visual. They told us to turn back over the water, descend to 1,500 feet, and come in under the ceiling. We thought that was a decent plan, since it looked fairly clear below the clouds.

The ceiling was dropping, and the cells were increasing in size and intensity. At seven to eight miles inbound, we got as low as 1,000 feet. Losing sight of the ground, we cried uncle. Doug told Yokota we were unable to maintain VMC and requested another approach and an initial steer. Yokota picked us up again and gave us a heading while we were figuring out what plan C was going to be.

Our radar now was filling up with red. Doug recommended we shoot the TACAN to runway 01, because the final approach course was offset from runway centerline by 13 degrees and might keep us clear of the weather cell blocking the ILS course. And if that didn't work, we would divert to Yokota or hold over the water until the weather got better. Yokota cleared us direct to the IAF for the TACAN approach, and then the fun really began.

Doug gave me an initial steer, saying, "Come right" for my so-called point-to-point. We were getting bounced around hard. I was working to stay plus or minus 300 feet from the assigned altitude because of the up-and-down drafts. The detachment guys in the back were throwing up

and asking when we were going to land.

Doug again told me to come right. I started to turn and then went back to my original heading. Doug took off the gloves and said, "Hooter, where the hell are you going? You need to come right to this heading now! What are you looking at?"

I told him I was looking at the No. 1 needle which was selected to the...duh...I still was set up for the ILS! I hadn't switched my needles over to TACAN. What a bonehead, T-34-student mistake. After switching needles, things made much more sense. Doug started to sound friendlier.

As we turned onto final-approach course, my CDI said I was slightly right of course while my No. 2 needle said I was slightly left of course. I chose the needle and continued down to minimums, skirting the bottom of the ceiling. At the missed-approach point, we still couldn't see the field. As Doug was about to tell me to go missed approach, I saw lights out of the corner of my eye. After we agreed that was the runway, I made an aggressive left turn to get on centerline, back to the right, and landed about 1,000 feet down the runway, which had standing water. After a little hydroplaning, a little braking, and a lot of reverse thrust, we landed. After having worked my tailhook off for 30 minutes, we were home.

I wonder what would have happened had Doug not been there. What if my copilot had been a nugget? Would he have helped me that much? Would he have been assertive enough to yell at me or even question me? Would we have had the confidence in each other as Doug and I had? 🇺🇸

At the time of this incident, LCdrs. Crawford and McQuillen were assigned to VRC-30, Det 1. LCdr. Crawford is now a SELRES with VR-57, and LCdr. McQuillen flies with VR-59.

Analyst comment: Certainly, the aircrew's confidence in each other (stemming from their long association) contributed to their decisions in the cockpit and their actions with regard to each other. In answering the questions posed in the last paragraph, it is important to take away from this that "trans-gradient cockpit authority" (a barrier to communication existing in a junior-senior or aggressive-passive crew relationship) can exist in multi-crew aircraft, but it need not. For the nuggets out there: if you are uncomfortable with a situation, speak up.—Cdr. Deke Forbes, carrier-aircraft-branch head and E-2/C-2 analyst, Naval Safety Center.

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